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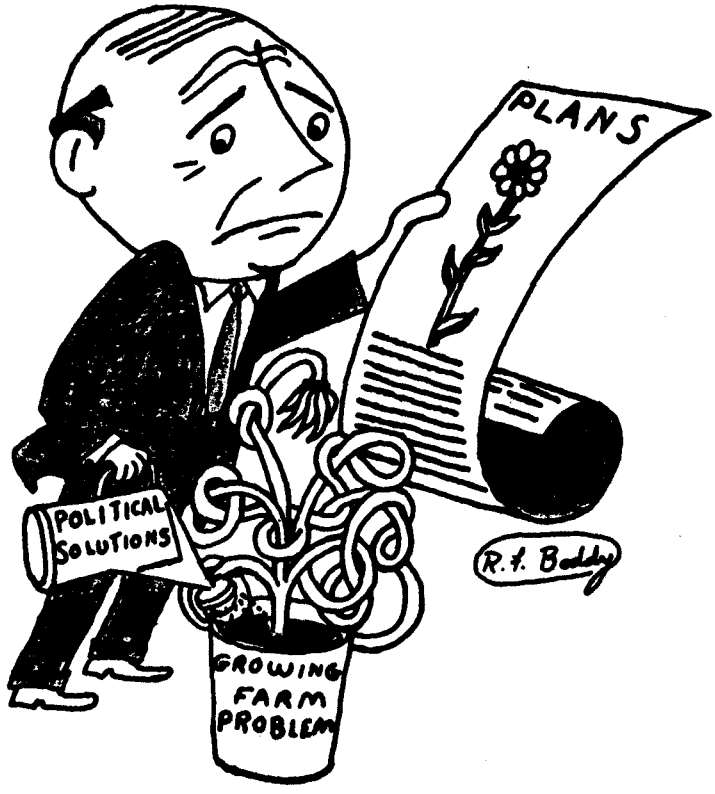
V I E W S



THE FARM PROBLEM

PART II -- CONTROLS, THE SURPLUS COMMODITY

In the February issue of Persuasion, I discussed the deplorable present state of farming in this country and traced the history of the farm problem from the early days of American settlement through the Roosevelt years to World War II.

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The radical policies of the New Deal provided an easy bridge to the tighter-than-ever controls placed on the wartime emergency situation. By 1941, the basic agricultural commodities were, in large measure, lifted out of the free market into a collectivized system. During the period of World War II and shortly after, from 1941 to 1948, prices for basic foods such as corn, wheat and cotton were very close to, and sometimes above, 100% of parity.

(The numerous plans to achieve parity constitute a long and complicated list, but they can be categorized into three basic methods: (a) If the supply of a crop reaches a point great enough to push prices below the parity level, the government stands ready to take the "surplus" off the market at parity prices. (b) Farmers are paid to control the production of certain crops by restricting and allotting acreage in accordance with a United States Department of Agriculture "master plan." (c) To improve the farmer's competitive position, the government sponsors programs which offer cheap credit and technical advice.)

Farm prices and income remained high for eight years of the postwar period because of a great demand throughout the whole world for farm goods during the reconstruction period (1945-1948) and during the Korean War (1950-1953). Much of this "demand," of course, was not true economic demand (which presupposes ability to purchase), but was <u>need</u>, a need which was met by the American taxpayer in the form of tax-supported foreign aid. But in the middle 1950's, with the disappearance of abnormally caused "demand," the farm problem returned to loom high on the Washington horizon. Capitol Hill found its familiar farm troubles compounded when production rose to unprecedented heights.

Farming had already experienced a technological revolution which reached its peak during World War II. (This revolution had begun early in the century, but was virtually halted during the Depression and New Deal years.) As a result, a new kind of American farm emerged--an efficient, modern business characterized by scientific methods, and an increased use of machinery and fertilizers. There was greater specialization of crops, and there was a concentration of production in larger farms which were capable of using technical discoveries to best advantage. The small farmer was becoming obsolete--a less efficient marginal producer who, in the face of falling prices, had little money to invest in machinery to compete with his more successful neighbors.

The so-called "cost-price squeeze" was discussed widely in the fifties by economists and legislators. Despite the context of a farm program which was dominated by a philosophy of ever increasing interventionism, some of these critics

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were so distressed by the farm debacle that they advocated a complete reversal of the government's role in agriculture. They wanted to clean house--to sweep away the controls (and with them, the ponderous bureaucracy of the USDA). Some of them defended their ideas on practical grounds alone, explaining that surpluses would drive prices down, sending less efficient farmers into other occupations where they would be more beneficial to themselves and to the whole economy; that this reduction of production would lower prices even more, causing a reduction of capital investments in that industry, bringing about a further decrease in production; that eventually, supply would drop sufficiently to meet demand.

But, even more important among these advocates of decontrol were men such as Karl C. King, representative from Pennsylvania, who recognized the moral implications of a choice between a free-market system and a collectivized economy. On May 3, 1955, King spoke against a proposed new price-supports bill by saying, in part, ". . . I think it should be kept in mind that there is no such thing as a permanent half-free and half-slave market. Eventually we must return the industry of agriculture to its position as an important segment of our great free-enterprise system, or we must proceed to create a fixed system in which farm prices are set by Washington and all farmers regimented into tight crop monopolies. . . . The basis of all our wealth is production. . . . The government has no money to pass out which it has not previously taken away from the people. . . ."

But Representative King and other supporters of this view met crushing opposition from advocates of government intervention who insisted that the economic lives of perhaps millions of farm families were at stake. They predicted that if controls were not strengthened, the collapse of the small farms would cause a nationwide depression and the destruction of the traditional way of American farm life. This, in general, was the position of President Truman and, later, of President Kennedy. Somewhere between these two positions were the "compromisers," headed by President Eisenhower, who sought to achieve parity by a combination policy which consisted, in effect, of some production control and some income support, but at a low level. During this period the parity ratio went below 100% for the first time since 1940, which gave further ammunition to the advocates of increased planning.

The battle went on in Congress, special interests tugging at the legislature from different directions, resulting in an inconsistent compromise which provided price supports at too low a level to protect the slim profit margins of small farmers, but at a sufficiently high level to enable farmers of greater productive capacity to receive a great deal of money. Limitations on production were not placed on the quantity of a crop, but on the number of acres planted. Many mechanized, efficient farmers, who could greatly increase the yield per acre by in-

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vesting in new machinery and better fertilizers, soon had a lucrative "easy money" source in Washington, since government not only paid them for withholding acreage from production, but bought up all of the surplus harvest above the government-established quota. Moreover, there was great laxity in production controls; some commodities like dairy products and certain feed grains were receiving price supports without production restrictions. This hodgepodge of policies has continued virtually unchanged.

The face of the Department of Agriculture has been red for a long time. How discomfiting to realize that the policies whose aim and justification was the protection of the "small American farmer" have fallen far short of their goal. How embarrassing to be confronted with the evidence that these policies have indeed helped to destroy him. Lower prices and shrinking profit margins are squeezing out the small farmer, and, of course, surpluses have long since reached the choking point. As if the productive ingenuity of efficient farmers was not enough to warn politicians of the "dreaded" increase in production, the government has established innumerable bureaus whose sole job it is to search for better and better farm techniques. These methods for the most part require too great a capital investment for the small farmer, but are tailor-made for the larger mechanized units. It is an incredible paradox that government research men would visit dairy farmers to show them a revolutionary new technique to enable them to more than double their production of cheddar cheese (by reducing the process time from 7-1/2 hours to less than 3-1/2 hours), while at the same time Washington is committed to buying surplus cheddar cheese at parity prices!

The government is burning the candle at both ends--it tries to expand and to restrict at the same time. Policies contradict each other right and left while the situation of the small farmer worsens daily.

In the current Administration, we can observe a very significant shift of emphasis in dealing with the farm problem. Having failed to muster support for the idea that controls might lead to agricultural efficiency (which they are obviously not doing), political leaders have switched to an attempt to muster sentimental support for farm controls in the name of preserving "the good old days." President Johnson, in a policy paper issued in November of 1964, made a startling statement in this connection:

"In the past, our farm programs have been designed to improve the economic position of the farmer and to protect against disaster--sudden or otherwise. Now we must aim at preserving and strengthening the structure of the whole rural society,

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based on the family farm and the rural community that have contributed so much to American tradition. We must make it possible for young people to spend their lives in the rural communities where they grew up--if they choose to do so--instead of being forced by economic necessity to tear up their roots and go to distant cities."

The "good old days" are being destroyed, it is reasoned, because many farmers have found it necessary to relocate in search of conditions more favorable to their success and well-being. The fact that the farmer must move is viewed as an evil economic imperative which the government must act to prevent.

What does this mean? If President Johnson has only the scantiest knowledge of history, he cannot ignore the fact that American frontiers were expanded precisely because of this "economic necessity." The prime motivation of the American pioneer was the promise of a new opportunity in a new land--a chance to increase his wealth and enjoy a better life than the one he left behind. If Johnson's estimate of relocation had prevailed from the time of the birth of this nation, the farm problem, particularly in the Middle and Far West would indeed have been alleviated. The area would never have been settled.

On November 24 of last year, Secretary of Agriculture, Orville L. Freeman, told newsmen that he had been asked by the President to "assume full leadership" in bringing rural areas into the Great Society. This new concern with "rural" areas (the definition of which is anything but clear) is an outgrowth of President Kennedy's policies contained in the Food and Agriculture Act of 1962, which provided for technical aid and loans for rural development, and payments for diverting cropland to recreational uses.

Johnson's "new" program is not a replacement for all the established controls, supports and surplus-disposal programs, but a huge addition to them, an addition which substantially extends the long arm of government. Johnson's new Food and Agriculture Act, passed in 1965, is but a more audacious variation on the same tired theme, this time widening the circle of intervention to include controls not only over the agricultural industry itself, but over what the President refers to affectionately as "Rural America." The new contribution of the current bill is the Cropland Adjustment Program which is described in a pamphlet published by the USDA entitled New Access to the Great Outdoors. With the alleged purpose of improving the methods of acreage allotment, the government offers payment increases to farmers for permitting the public without charge to fish, hunt, trap and hike on diverted acreage under agreements between the farmer and the USDA. The intention, states the pamphlet, is the "preservation of open spaces, national beauty, development of wildlife or recrea-

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tional facilities, or prevention of air or water pollution." Apparently they envision new rural "wonderlands" which will stimulate traffic into what is currently referred to as "economic disaster areas" and somehow help the impoverished small farmer. At the same time, Washington hopes to make the "good old days" available to the city dweller too—the air, fish and woods that he is presumably yearning for.

President Johnson, like all of his recent predecessors, has proudly announced that this time we will cure the farm problem. He has even claimed that by 1970 government stockpiles of surplus grains will have disappeared. Surplus disposal programs have been around since 1945; the major techniques have been (1) outright donations to the needy in this country and abroad, and (2) sales to foreign countries for dollars, most often at a loss. The most hair-raising example of the second technique occurred in 1963. Following a disastrously low harvest in Russia, the United States responded by authorizing wheat sales to the Soviets—65.6 million bushels with a U.S. market value of $159 million were sold to Russia for $116 million. The difference of $43 million was made up to the exporters by direct government payments. This means that your tax dollar and mine made it possible for Russia to purchase American wheat at a discount. It means something else, too: that Russia can concentrate more of its resources on military and propagandist activities—resources that otherwise would have to be used in agriculture.

What might otherwise too obviously be a free giveaway program has been carefully named "Food for Peace"; the program has come to be used as an instrument of United States foreign policy. Incredibly, it is hoped that filling foreign stomachs with wheat from America will somehow fill foreign minds with allegiance to America. The focus has been successfully switched from the fact that the program was originally a means of disposing of an embarrassing surplus; "Food for Peace" is classified in the annual Presidential budget as a foreign-affairs outlay rather than an agricultural program outlay.

According to Johnson's bold promise to rid the U.S. of its excess crops, we can expect that without any significant change in the policies that created the surpluses, LBJ will somehow clear out not only normal storage facilities, but also the incalculable amounts of crops lying around in caves, abandoned factories, oil tanks, schoolrooms, hangers and gymnasiums. Not to mention a fleet of hundreds of World War II merchant vessels which is sitting in the Hudson River stuffed with grain. (Perhaps he intends to move this fleet beyond the three-mile limit, and so "out of the country.")

Close examination of the basic devices used to control agriculture makes it abundantly clear that they are not merely ridiculous, but tragic—not only self-defeating, but unjust. Unjust, because in fact they constitute an intolerable in-

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fringement of individual rights.

Consider parity. If any single idea could be called the guiding principle of government farm policy, this is it. Parity proponents give us part or all of the following argument:

"We must support Farmer Jones. Everyone's prosperity depends on the prosperity of Farmer Jones. If he doesn't have the purchasing power to buy industrial goods, the whole country will go to pot. Besides, agriculture is the most essential industry of all--we can survive without washing machines, but not without food. And we must realize that farmers are faced with fierce and unfair competition, unlike any other sector of the economy. For example, Farmer Jones must cope with unexpected weather conditions. Nature, not man, is the ultimate determining factor in his production. He competes for his fair share of the national income with businessmen who are not affected by any such unpredictable factors. We've got to keep them down on the farm no matter what it takes--and what it takes is guaranteeing Farmer Jones his fair share of the national income. Now, back around 1912 things were the way they ought to be. Compared with the rest of the country, Farmer Jones was in good shape. The sensible thing is to keep farm prices high enough to keep the same relationship. And let's not forget his contribution to American tradition. Doesn't the small family farm constitute the backbone of our country?"

Every farm program in existence today is, in the final analysis, an attempt to freeze the agricultural industry in the image of Farmer Jones, 1912. Let's look at the argument more closely.

First of all, is it true that if we keep the farmer's income high he will purchase industrial goods and thereby improve the economy of the whole country? No, it is not true. If a bushel of wheat which would sell for $2.00 on the free market is pushed up to $2.50 by government edict, it is certainly true that the farmer has 50¢ more to spend. But where did the 50¢ come from? If it is tacked onto the price of a loaf of bread, then the city consumer has 50¢ less to spend. The economy, in general, has not been advanced one bit. And, if the $2.50 price was achieved by artificially cutting down the supply, through curtailing production or holding back crops, the economy, in general, has suffered a loss--lost production of the restricted land, lost potential investments of tax money expropriated to finance the program.

Regarding the idea that we must encourage people to stay on the farm to assure the country of enough food--in view of what has already been said about increases in production, the decreasing number of farmers, and the incredible "surpluses," this

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premise is blatantly absurd. The companion argument that the farmer is faced with "unfair competition" from business is also untenable. As far as the farmer's dependency on nature is concerned, every industry contains inherent factors and risks which are part of the full context of that particular business, and which must be carefully considered when a businessman plans long-range. Farming is no exception.

The appeal for price protection against drought could be claimed with equal validity by an umbrella manufacturer.

Assuming for the moment that it were possible to achieve parity, is it sound reasoning to even want to preserve the price relationships of a certain historical period? No, it is not. When one considers how much more efficiently and cheaply most foods are produced today, 1912 looks pre-historic. If, in 1966, the same percentage of income were required to buy an automobile as in 1912, I daresay the roads would be comparatively deserted. Moreover, how does the parity system account for the infinite number of items which have only recently been created? How many bushels of wheat would it have taken in 1912 to purchase a television set?

Now, let's turn to the last point of the argument—that Farmer Jones has a claim on your dollar and mine because he constitutes the backbone of America. In what way is he the backbone of our country? Economically? It has been shown that the economy of the whole country does not depend on farming. Numerically? It has been many decades since the farmers constituted even a slim majority of the population. Today, less than 6% of the people in America are engaged in farming. Spiritually? Yes, what is usually meant by those who refer to the "traditional American farmer" is that he is a nostalgic symbol of the spirit of "rugged individualism" displayed by the early pioneer settlers of the West—a cherished image of the last remnants of a bygone era when a man could exist on a virtually self-sustaining basis.

And herein lies the most painful paradox of all. In the name of preserving the freedom and independence of the American farmer, the farm program has produced a vast institution of government wards. There are scores of small farmers victimized by the "paternal protection" emanating from Washington; they can testify to the fact that independence cannot be promoted by enforcing controls any more than a man can remain free while being chained.

Consider these comments made in the Saturday Evening Post article (May, 1965) entitled "Get the Government Off the Farm," by Alice Pearse Bean, the wife of a small farmer:

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"Year after year the Government pays us more and more attention, meddling in our lives so much it seems the bureaucrats must think they have squatter's rights on the farms. . . . I'd like to point out to them that we didn't ask for most of that legislation, and we don't want it. . . . We farmers don't need what we're getting--more and more 'assistance' from the Government. We need less, or even none. . . ."

Mrs. Bean describes the "assistance" in detail: "Elaborate instructions come in a constant flood--we must plant such and such to qualify for not planting something else. . . . In the fall the Government sends us a notice of how many acres of wheat we can plant the following year. Spring brings buds, birds, and also a ubiquitous employee of the Government to measure our poor plot of wheat. . . . He carefully measures the seeded land, sometimes with the aid of aerial photographs. . . . If even a tenth of an acre too much land has been seeded, the extra wheat must be destroyed. . . . The excess area must be measured again, and this time the farmer is billed for the cost of the return trip the smiling fellow makes."

In May, 1963, wheat farmers were presented with a new bill instigated by President Kennedy which proposed marketing controls and price supports that were more stringent than any past programs. The bill was defeated in a referendum vote held among wheat farmers. Mrs. Bean goes on to comment on this vote and its consequences:

"Some of us who grow wheat regard the current Wheat-Cotton Act as a bitter pill administered because of the way we farmers behaved in 1963. . . . A referendum was held among farmers. The vote was overwhelmingly no. . . . The Secretary of Agriculture . . . made it very clear that either we went along with his program or we would suffer the dire consequences, such as a price of only a dollar a bushel for wheat. Instead of reading the 'no' message we sent them loud and clear, they ignored it and gave us the Wheat-Cotton Act. . . . What we question is whether it is either good business or morally right for the Government to pay us even one dollar for wheat that nobody wants, and for which all of us must ante up not only the initial cost but also the cost of storage. We have considered refusing to participate in the program; after all, it is voluntary, and to refuse to go along will not bring the Gestapo to our door. Yet the impact of this stand for our principles would hardly be felt across the county road in front of the house. Moreover, such a stand could mean we'd be exiled from the Government program forever. The message was delivered to a neighbor who asked at the A.S.C.S. [Agric. Stabilization and Conserv. Service] Office, after the referendum, what would happen if he didn't sign up for the control program. He was told he would be suspended from any future allotment program. This looked to us like 'voluntary' compulsion."

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The terminology is all too apt. If a farmer is forbidden any government assistance, it means that he must compete with his subsidized neighbor. He has the "free" choice of either hopelessly trying to profit by selling his non-subsidized wheat on a market glutted with price-supported wheat, or--quitting wheat farming. The farmer who might like to be totally self-supporting has been given a choice by the government of becoming a martyr or of joining the subsidy program. The government's position is, in effect, that a farmer may plant wheat, but only on its terms. Mrs. Bean concludes her article:

"As it is we grow all the wheat we are allowed to, and accept all the payments the Government will give us. We farmers have lost the freedom to plant what we want, and we accept the subsidy as compensation for the loss of our rights--and a poor bargain it is. . . . We continue to accept the Government's money, and go right on trying to bite the hand that feeds us."

Given the extent of the government's stranglehold on agriculture, Mrs. Bean's situation is not surprising. Neither is her attitude toward accepting subsidies. Government interference in the economy has created conditions in many fields that make reliance on government help the only reasonable course of action. Should the student refuse to attend a state university when taxation has limited the funds available to him for education, as well as the amount of private investment in education? Should the elderly person, who could not save for his old age after taxes, refuse to accept social security payments? Should the man who had been drafted refuse disability compensation? No. At the same time, to use Mrs. Bean's metaphor, he should "bite the hand that feeds" by fighting the current collectivist trend in every possible way (such as speaking out, as she did). To achieve a free economy, one must strive to alter the direction of policy away from greater and greater control and to establish the government's proper role as the protector of individual rights.

The answer to the farm problem applies to all areas of our so-called "mixed economy." The farmer's right to trade freely on the open, unhampered marketplace must be recognized. The industry must be cleared of any arbiters except the one that belongs there--the law of supply and demand. The interventionist approach was as unjust and impractical in 1865 as it is today and we now have a century of overwhelming evidence to examine. That the federal farm program has failed is inescapable to anyone willing to look at the facts.

However, decontrolling must be gradual. One cannot expect the irrational policies of a century to be rectified overnight. The shift must be made as painless as possible since the livelihoods of many citizens now depend on existing policies. The

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details of the "how" and the "when" must be determined justly with fair warning given before supports are removed.

But the first and most essential step is to spread the conviction that laissez-faire capitalism--and nothing short of it--can assure Farmer Jones and all his fellow citizens of an economy in which they can enjoy prosperity and freedom.

--Lois Roberts

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REVIEWS

HOW'RE YOU GONNA KEEP THEM DOWN ON THE FARM?

Women and Work in America, by Robert W. Smuts, Columbia University Press, New York, 1959

During most of the 19th century, this country was predominantly rural and agricultural. In 1890, when the U.S. Census announced that the frontier was closed as a distinction could no longer be drawn between the settled West and the unsettled West, two-thirds of the nation's population still lived in rural areas, and nearly half of all American women still lived on farms. But by 1890, too, we were already becoming an urban, industrial country.

What does it mean for a society to transform itself from rural to urban, from agricultural to industrial? It means a remarkable change in living patterns. This brief book (155 pages) is a clear and readable look at what these changes were in the working lives of American women.

Certain things, of course, remain by nature unchanged. Women still bear the children and take primary responsibility for rearing them. "Housekeeping," as the author points out, "is still the main occupation of American women." (p.1) But what is housekeeping? "A glance at any woman's magazine testifies to the enormous importance of making today's home a place of beauty, culture, and spotless cleanliness; of keeping husbands contented and happy; and on insuring the sound emotional development of children....Interior decorating, gardening, preparation of varied and attractive menus, personal beauty care, and chauffeuring, entertaining, supervising, and otherwise catering to children --all take far more time that they used to....Less occupied with meeting the physical needs of her husband and children, the wife is now expected to help them pursue the elusive goal of happiness." (p.28)

It was not thus for women on the 19th-century farm. "Like farm women throughout history, they rose before the sun and spent their days as active partners in the family's common work." (p.6) Mr. Smuts discusses over several pages the responsibilities of the farm wife, which included, besides some early years of actual field work, the entire care of the kitchen garden; the preserving of the farm's vegetables, fruits and berries; the care of cattle, pigs, and poultry; making brooms, mattresses, and floor mats from straw and corn husks; churning butter and gathering eggs; giving food and lodging to all travelers;

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nursing the sick, not only in her family but being on call for neighborhood emergencies; and doing the cooking and laundry and clothes-making for her often large family.

It is obvious, as Mr. Smuts states, that work is nothing new in the life of the American woman. But paid work, and work outside the home, have not always been taken for granted as possibilities for any woman, regardless of her social and marital status, as they are today.

How did woman get from then to now, from the farm to the suburb? In reading this book, one notices that the change in the condition of women is just one aspect in the gradual subdivision of labor characteristic of the growth of capitalism.

When the population is primarily agricultural, the family functions together as the prime economic unit. It is a miniature collective, in which men, women and children all work together, not for pay, but to stay alive. The sons work the fields, the daughters help in the house, and the children are thus a major economic value to their parents. This collective is able to do with little actual cash because of the wide variety of goods which it produces and then consumes itself. Additional goods and services can be gained from neighbors by barter.

But as manufactured articles make their appearance on the economic scene, articles like cloth, machinery, building materials, the collective family can not barter for everything and needs more money. Since the men and the older boys are needed in the fields, it is the women and children who start doing work for money. Married women earn money at home, by taking in boarders, doing laundry, and selling butter and eggs. But the daughters start to work outside the home. They teach school; they go into domestic service; they even hire out as farm hands. The money earned, of course, belongs to the family. "In 1890," says Mr. Smuts, "children were the principal source of supplementary income." (p. 66)

It was in the early 19th century that factories first appeared on the American scene, in New England. And "the work was quickly identified as peculiarly suited for women, or rather, for girls...mill work was generally regarded as a desirable way to preserve young women from the moral perils of idleness, and at the same time add to the wealth of the community without drawing men and boys away from more important work in agriculture." (p. 17-18) As eminent a man as Alexander Hamilton thought that "women and children are rendered more useful...by manufacturing establishments, than they would otherwise be." (p. 139)

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If this was the reason the factories were approved of by some observors, Mr. Smuts has collected ample evidence that it is not the reason that women and children went to work in them. They went to work to augment the family income. "Although farm girls had little opportunity to work as long as they remained at home, they were, on the whole, more eager to work than girls born and brought up in cities....A factory had only to open its doors in any part of the rural Unitied States to find itself besieged by girls and young women from miles around, all eager for work. Rather than wait for the factory to come to them, moreover, girls were moving from farm to city jobs in a steady stream. The reasons are not hard to find. The average farm girl was accustomed to long hours of hard manual labor. It did not occur to her that a factory job might be beneath her dignity. She and her family saw in the factory a chance to increase their cash earnings, and to insure a more stable income, independent of the weather and the extreme fluctuations of the agricultural market. This was an opportunity which appealed even to prosperous farm families." (p. 46) In December, 1891, textile mill workers who answered questionaires sent out by the North Carolina Commissioner of Labor Statistics had some complaints, but "few of the workers complained bitterly about working conditions that were much harder in many ways than in any other branch of American industry....Some pointed out that mill workers were much better off than they would have been on the farms from which most of them came." (p. 96)

For a strange thing was happening. Girls worked in factories, not merely to help the family, but to earn money for themselves. "I like to be independent and spend my money as I please," one girl is quoted as saying to a contemporary. (p. 41) To many middle- and upper-class observers, "the working girl's extravagant expenditureson clothing were one of the major social and moral problems of the day...the conclusion that many girls worked to pay for their wardrobes was not unfounded....If the young woman of 1890 wanted to be a lady, she had to stay home; but going to work could at least allow her to dress like a lady, and could make life pleasanter in a great many other ways as well." (p.42)

It is important to note that while the factory was thus making more of an independent individual of the elder daughter in the farm family, it was gradually instilling in people an awareness of children as individuals too, individuals who should be educated. It was in the early days of manufacture that Hamilton thought of factory work as good for idle children; and it was the poor white South (where many women were still doing heavy farm work all their lives) that had children of seven and eight employed in mills near the turn of the century. "Outside of Southern mill villages, children as young as seven and eight were rarely employed, especially if they were girls." (p. 45) It seems that the more

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poverty-stricken the background, the more young children were looked on as economic parts of the family, and "through the combined efforts of every member, many families succeeded in earning $25 a week--not only more than they had dreamed of, but more than most families of skilled workers and small tradesmen had to live on." (p. 47) Workers themselves were beginning to value education as the key to a better economic life. In the 1981 North Carolina questionaires, referred to above, some textile workers "thought that the mills should not employ children, at least until they were twelve years old and had completed six grades in school," and a young woman wrote, "the greatest need of the laboring class in this locality are facilities for intellectual development." (p.96)

Not all working girls were from the farm, of course. Many factory workers, especially in the New England textile mills, were immigrants. When a family came to the city, either from farm or abroad, its older daughters were apt to work in a factory. But the girls who grew up in the city wanted something less taxing and disagreeable, and they started to take advantage of new opportunities in department stores and offices. Meanwhile, the middle-class married woman was stigmatized if she worked, as it was taken as a sign of failure on the part of her husband. "The nineteenth-century case against women's employment sought to keep them in a home that was increasingly deprived of vital activities and the presence of other adults." (p. 154)

And the inevitable happened. "The growth of commercial enterprise in fields of work which had always engaged housewives has done much more than deprive some women of opportunities at home. As prepared foods, ready-made clothing, and commercial laundry services became more widely available at reasonable cost, more and more women took advantage of them to reduce the time and labor devoted to providing goods and services for their own families. Because of the perfection of a variety of household appliances and conveniences, the traditional services that women continue to perform in the home are accomplished more quickly and much more easily. In 1890, the sewing machine and the egg beater were about the only mechanical aids in most homes. One is apt to think, in this connection, of such appliances as washing machines and vacuum cleaners, but central heating and hot and cold running water have probably done as much to ease women's work as all of the mechanical cleaning devices combined. All of these developments might be summarized by saying that the work of women within the home, like the rest of the nation's work, has been transformed by the advance of industry. Small-scale domestic production has given way to mass production for a wide market; human energy, to mechanical and electrical. And for women as for men, the new ways of working have saved much time and more effort." (p. 26-27)

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Mr. Smuts examines this "transformation" four times over, under four chapter headings: "The Work of Women," "The Women Who Work," "The Demands and Rewards of Women's Work," and "Women, Men, and Work: Values and Attitudes." He provides a great deal of detail culled from autobiographical reports and realistic fiction of the turn of the century as well as from official studies and records. Perhaps his greatest virtue is his stress on the importance of the context in evaluating economic conditions: "The attitudes of people toward their own conditions are always circumscribed by what they are accustomed to andwhat they can reasonably hope for. From today's vantage point, or even from the viewpoint of the middle and upper classes of 1890, the working woman of 1890 labored under intolerable conditions. The average working woman, however, had no burning sense of being wronged. She went to work, not because she had to in order to eat, but because she thought that, on balance, she would be better off if she worked. What she got from work was usually very much what she had expected. If she had come from Europe, or from a poor farm in America, what she found was sometimes considerably better that what she had expected. When she thought of something still better, she was more likely to hope for an early marriage to a good husband than for an easier job or higher pay." (p. 93)

Today, more women work in offices than in factories, and "by and large, the danger, the cruelty, the threats to life and health, and even most of the sweat of work have been removed." (p. 99) Today, women of all classes and conditions expect to work at some time during their lives. There is no stigma; there is no real issue any more. Today, however, there is a great deal of concern about something called "the fragmentation of the family." But a look at the details of economic history, such as this study provides, leads one to the question--what does this mean? Are people deploring the disappearance of the old, collective family economic unit in which everyone, even the youngest, was engaged in a bone-crushing battle for economic survival? Capitalism has wiped it out, it's true; and its symbol, the family farm, is disappearing also. "The farm is the last stronghold of the family, as an economic unit, but of the 43 million families in the nation in 1956...less than one million depended entirely upon such income." (p. 25) Instead, the family is now becoming a group of independent individuals living together, in which each member can have his own productive interests and in which children can be educated, not exploited. Surely we don't want to keep them down on the farm.

---Joan Kennedy Taylor

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